MEMORANDUM

CIVIC CENTER SITE PLAN

Prepared by Sydney H. Williams,
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DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING
City and County of San Francisco

Feb 9 1948

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DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING City and County of San Francisco

MEMORANDUM

CIVIC CENTER SITE PLAN

A discussion of the need for and a suggested procedure for preparation of a new comprehensive site plan for the expansion of the Civic Center Area in San Francisco.

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THE NEED FOR A NEW CIVIC CENTER SITE PLAN

The growth in municipal and other governmental services accompanying the development of the San Francisco Civic Center since the original plan was prepared shortly after the 1906 fire*, has recently been expressed by federal, state and municipal departments in both specific and tentative plans for expansion of their physical plants. These plans, as they are developed in the future, will require an area much larger than that encompassed by the original Civic Center plan, and will require types of facilities not envisioned at the time the original plan was prepared. The need for a new Civic Center Site Plan to coordinate the plans of the separate agencies of government has become increasingly urgent, and it has been proposed by the Department of City Planning that such a plan be prepared early in the coming fiscal year.

The following seven projects proposed to the Department of City Planning for the current Capital Improvement Program are of city-wide importance and are to be located, or might be located, in the present Civic Center.

A central activities building for the Recreation Department;	$ 200,000
A Drama Center presently proposed by the Recreation Commission to be located in the Angelo J. Rossi Playground at Arguello Boulevard and Edward Street. (Part of a $550,000 project for this Playground);	- -
An annex to the Hall of Justice at Portsmouth Square proposed as an alternative to a building to be located in the Civic Center to house Civil and Criminal Courts. This project was submitted following failure at the bond election in November, 1948;	6,000,000
A building for the storage of voting machines proposed by the Department of Finance and Records. The 1948 Grand Jury recommended that this facility be located in the vicinity of the Civic Center.	115,000
Improvements to the Civic Auditorium proposed by the Real Estate Department;	150,000
Provision of partitions and shelving within the City Hall by the San Francisco Law Library. The Librarian of the Law Library has commented that the provision of additional space not presently available in the City Hall will be inescapable by 1952. This is a continuing project; expenditure of $3,500 is required for the first year;	- -

*An exhaustive search of official records, and other inquiries has failed to locate any satisfactory legal or graphic record of the original plan.

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An addition to the Main Library, proposed by the Public Library Commission. $1,116,750

Additional bond issues and capital expenditures have been proposed during the past year which affect, or might affect, the Civic Center area. In response to the referral concerning the then proposed Civic and Criminal Courts building, the City Planning Commission on March 26, 1948, put itself on record in favor of the preparation of a new site plan for the enlarged Civic Center. Subsequent referrals have included a Convention Center, which failed in the recent bond election, and a new building for the Hastings College of Law, proposed by the Regents of the University of California. Also on September 2, 1948, the San Francisco Grand Jury proposed the construction within, or adjacent to, the Civic Center of a functional City Office Building to eliminate the "disorderly decentralization" of the various departments of the city government located inside and outside the City Hall. Finally, the needs of the State and Federal governments for office building space are still to be ascertained and may be very large.

All of the recent proposals described affect the future development of the Civic Center area, and it has been the consistent opinion of this department that the criteria for proper selection of sites must be based on a new comprehensive site plan for the Civic Center. This opinion was supported by the Art Commission in a recent memorandum to the Mayor dated July 7, 1948. On January 25, 1949, The Northern California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects adopted a resolution strongly supporting the proposal for the preparation of a new Civic Center Plan.

Type of Plan Needed

The type of plan proposed to guide the future development of the Civic Center would be specific and precise in regard to the use, size, and architectural form of all buildings, public areas, and open spaces to be developed in the Civic Center. It would be based on an accurate and up-to-date survey of the current and future needs of federal, state, municipal, and quasi-public activities which should or could be located in the Civic Center. It should be designed to result in a dignified architectural composition which will emphasize the vital role of San Francisco as the predominant governmental and cultural center of western United States. It must be recognized that the preparation of such a plan is not a routine function for the departments of the city government but will require the services of the best architectural and site planning firms in the West, assisted by the many governmental agencies concerned.

Suggested Procedure for Preparation

To provide a plan which will satisfy the needs of all the governmental agencies involved, and which will receive wholehearted public support when completed, the following procedure is recommended

for its preparation:

1. Creation of an advisory and coordinating committee made up of city, state, and federal agencies to ensure the preparation of a plan which will satisfy their respective requirements.

2. Employment of a firm or group of associated firms of architects and site planners to prepare a plan for the future development of the Civic Center. It is recommended that immediate supervision of the work of the firms hired be vested in a technical committee composed of the Director of Public Works, the Director of Property, a representative of the Art Commission, and the Director of Planning. The consultant firm, or firms, which must consist of an organization capable of producing an outstanding plan in a limited period, should provide all necessary professional and drafting services except for such assistance as can be rendered by the City.

3. Formation of a committee representing the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the Association of Landscape Architects, the Federation of Arts, and other professional and citizen groups to review the architectural and esthetic features of the plan when developed.

4. Adoption of the completed plan by the City Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors as an Official Plan, being a precised section of the Master Plan.

Estimated Cost of Preparation

The City of Oakland has expended $38,000 for the completion of a Civic Center Plan, Los Angeles $20,000 for a preliminary plan, and Detroit has appropriated $54,000 for a new Civic Center plan now under preparation.

The cost of preparation of a satisfactory site plan for the Civic Center Area in San Francisco has been estimated at $40,000. The breakdown of this sum between various phases of the project would be approximately as follows:

Physical survey of Civic Center area	$ 3,000
Survey and estimate of governmental needs	8,000
Preliminary plans of Civic Center area	5,000
Final plans for Civic Center area	15,000
Studies of individual buildings needed	2,000
Preparation of detailed scale model	4,000
Landscaping studies and plans	2,000
Contingency	1,000
Total.....	$40,000

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The foregoing amounts can be seen to represent but a small fraction of the millions of dollars to be spent on construction for the purposes of governmental administration in San Francisco in the next decade. The proposed appropriation of $40,000 for the Civic Center plan may be compared with $90,000 proposed by the Park Department for plans alone for the development of Buena Vista Park, McLaren Park and the Yacht Harbor. It should be noted that the proposed expenditure, which will radically affect the improvement of one of the most important centers in San Francisco, will cost little more than the lighting of a single neighborhood playground.

The original site plan for the Civic Center has served its purpose well in having provided the nucleus of an outstanding Civic Center for San Francisco. The governmental needs for the future, however, require an area much larger than that encompassed by the original plan and types of facilities not envisioned at the time the original plan was prepared. The design of a new site plan, in addition to satisfying functional needs, should result in a dignified architectural composition which will emphasize the vital role of San Francisco as a predominant governmental and cultural center of western United States.

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